DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 763 HE 033 891

TITLE	A Documentary Analysis of Nursing Degree Curricula. Research Highlights 38.
INSTITUTION	English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, London.
PUB DATE	1999-07-00
NOTE	8 p.; For a more detailed report on the same study, see HE 033 890.
AVAILABLE FROM	English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, Publications Department, Victory House, 170 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P OHA, England, United Kingdom. Tel: 0207-391-6314; e-mail: pubs@enb.org.uk. For full text: http://www.enb.org.uk/rhconten.htm.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Course Content; Criteria; *Curriculum; *Degrees (Academic); Foreign Countries; *Graduate Study; Higher Education; Nursing; *Nursing Education; *Outcomes of Education; Program Descriptions
IDENTIFIERS	*England

ABSTRACT

This 12-month study was undertaken by a research team that aimed to compare the learning outcomes and content of pre- and post-registration nursing degrees. Curriculum documents from 50 pre- and post-registration degree programs from 32 institutions were catalogued and coded for descriptive characteristics. A subset of 15 documents representing the entire sample was analyzed in depth. This report outlines the context in which the study was undertaken and presents summaries of the descriptive and categorical data and the findings of the in-depth analysis. The major implications of these findings are summarized. (Author/SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 451 763

ENB
QUALITY EDUCATION FOR QUALITY CARE

THIRTY-EIGHT

JULY 1999

research HIGHLIGHTS

A Documentary Analysis of Nursing Degree Curricula

Research Team Members

Project Director: Dr. Jill Robinson, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia, formerly of University College Suffolk

Project Researcher: Jen Leamon, Bournemouth University, formerly of University College Suffolk

Steering Group

Professor Helen Simons (Chair), University of Southampton

Hamza Aumeer, Education Officer, English National Board

Sonia Crow, Assistant Director for Education Policy (Research & Development), English National Board

Dr. Kate Gerrish, Senior Research Fellow, Sheffield Hallam University

Bev Labbett, Lecturer in Education, University of East Anglia

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

O. AKinade

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

Victory House
170 Tottenham Court Road
London W1P 0HA

Telephone: 0207 388 3131

HE 033 991

QUALITY EDUCATION · ENB · FOR QUALITY CARE ·

THIRTY-EIGHT

JULY 1999

esearch HIGHLIGHTS

A Documentary Analysis of Nursing Degree Curricula

Research Team Members

Project Director: Dr. Jill Robinson, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia, formerly of University College Suffolk

Project Researcher: Jen Leamon, Bournemouth University, formerly of University College Suffolk

Steering Group

Professor Helen Simons (Chair), University of Southampton

Hamza Aumeer, Education Officer, English National Board

Sonia Crow, Assistant Director for Education Policy (Research & Development), English National Board

Dr. Kate Gerrish, Senior Research Fellow, Sheffield Hallam University

Bev Labbett, Lecturer in Education, University of East Anglia

Abstract

This 12 month study was undertaken by a research team based at University College Suffolk and aimed to compare the learning outcomes and content of pre- and post-registration nursing degrees. Curriculum documents from 50 pre- and post-registration degree programmes from 32 institutions were catalogued and coded for descriptive characteristics. A subset of 15 documents was subject to in-depth analysis. This subset was selected to reflect the characteristics of the main sample of documents. The Research Highlights outline the context in which this study was undertaken and present summaries of both the descriptive, and categorical data and the findings of the in-depth analysis. Finally, the major implications of these findings are summarised.

Main Findings

1. Context

The recent proliferation in nursing degrees over the last 10 years has occurred against a backdrop of changes both in practice and in higher education. The NHS reforms (DoH, 1990) created new demands on the skills needed for practice with increasing emphasis on management, leadership and research. Promotion of lifelong learning and continuing professional development (ENB, 1994; UKCC, 1994) have extended the market for a broader range of post-registration qualifications. Lastly the implementation of Project 2000 heralded the integration of nurse education into Higher Education Institutions which were themselves also subject to major changes.

English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

Victory House
170 Tottenham Court Road
London W1P 0HA

Telephone: 0207 388 3131
Fax: 0207 383 4031

HE03891

These changes included increasing diversity in course provision, modularisation, credit rating and sector unification. Research focussing on UK graduate standards found a lack of comparability generally in UK undergraduate provision, that employers had difficulty understanding the purposes of Higher Education and that there was a need to enhance common understandings and standards in assessment processes (HEQC, 1997). Our study was therefore part of a much wider debate about the comparability of UK degrees in general.

2. Characteristics of Curriculum Documents

Thirty-two institutions participated in the study and provided a total of 50 courses leading to the award of a degree in nursing. This total was distributed across three main types of course in the following way:

- 22 pre-registration degrees
- 11 post-registration degrees with Higher Award
- 17 post-registration degrees (non Higher Award)

There was wide diversity in the range and nature of information provided in curriculum documents. The extent of variation in terms of style and content was more than we had anticipated and comparisons between documents were therefore difficult to make. Some examples from the data highlight the way in which courses varied in relation to some simple descriptive variables. Table 1 shows the range of variation in title of award for each major category of course. There did not appear to be any consistent relationship between title of award and type of degree although the title Bachelor of Nursing was used only for courses offered within old universities which had a long history of offering degrees in nursing.

Table 2 shows the extent of shared learning over 5 different categories of student. Most shared learning appeared to be with students from other nursing courses or with midwifery students but there were a number of courses which claimed to encourage sharing with students outside nursing.

There was considerable variation in the way in which credit frameworks were structured. Table 3 shows the variation for modules of different credit values. For example, six courses had predominantly 10 credit modules. Within these six courses, a ten credit module could range from 75 to 180 total learning hours, 20-40 hours of formal contact and were assessed by assignments which ranged from 1500 to 3000 words or by a combination of assignment and examination. So courses were not only structured around basic modules of differing credit value, but there was also little consistency across courses of the notional value of credits in terms of teaching, learning and assessment.

Through an analysis of course structure 5 pathway models were constructed to demonstrate the range of variation in structure in terms of progression, opportunities for shared learning and choice. The models ranged from a relatively simple structure with sequential progression and limited opportunities for shared learning or pathway choice, through to highly complex structures with multiple pathways and a range of possible outcomes. The most complex structures were only found within post-registration programmes.

The findings which were generated from the in-depth analysis of a subset of 15 documents focussed primarily on an examination of the intended aims and learning outcomes of core modules. These findings are presented here under the following headings:

- discourses of level and progression
- discourses of graduateness
- discourses of practice and assessment

3. Discourses of level and progression

What was most apparent in the curriculum documents studied, was the almost universal use of level descriptors originating from Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956). This was either explicitly referenced or implicitly revealed in the terminology used. These level descriptors were often linked in some way to the experiential taxonomy of Steinaker and Bell (1979) or Benner (1984) particularly in relation to the way in which students were expected to

progress in their practical skills development.

Winter (1993) suggests that there is an absence of empirical evidence to show that incremental learning follows the sequence of level descriptors which most courses use, nor can it be assumed that cognitive level descriptors function in a similar way to experiential descriptors. Therefore, although there was considerable similarity in the ways in which levels were described in course learning outcomes, it seems likely that this is an artefact of the heavy influence of Bloom's Taxonomy on the language of level and progression than evidence of similarity beyond superficial labelling.

Evidence of comparable notions of level was more apparent where documents attempted to discriminate between graduate and non-graduate level activity or outcome. We have dealt with this separately as a discourse of graduateness.

4. Discourses of graduateness

In course aims and learning outcomes there was evidence of a number of common features in the way the concept of graduateness was articulated. The range of features of this concept, which were commonly included in curriculum documents, are represented in Table 4.

For most courses the added value of degree level research was that students moved beyond mere appreciation and appraisal towards actively doing research and contributing empirical knowledge to their area of practice. All degree programmes included a substantial, in-depth, independent project undertaken over an extended period of time although the nature of such a project varied from course to course.

5. Discourses of practice and assessment

As well as a distinct construct of caring and reflective practice in the way documents tried to articulate a notion of graduateness, other aspects of practice were evident in the data. The complexity of the clinical environment in which students developed their practice was reflected by the wide range of organisational partnerships which many HE institutions had to construct and maintain in order to deliver practice based components of the curriculum. There were similarities across courses in that clinical assessors would normally have completed an ENB 998 course and have had some experience of qualified clinical practice. However, the way in which the role of lecturers in clinical areas was described suggested considerable variation ranging from hands-on practitioner to more distant educational resource for formal teaching and learning events.

Where practice was assessed as part of the course outcomes there were a number of ways in which this was achieved, including tick box competency statements, skills logs, learning contracts and portfolios. It was clear that some institutions found it particularly difficult to find strategies to award academic credits for practice based components.

6. Summary of the ways in which documents were comparable

- all pre-registration courses had to meet external requirements relating to structure, process and outcome.
- in most courses the graduate nurse was conceptualised as an innovative leader who was flexible and able to manage resources and handle change.
- comparable terms were used as level descriptors in both the assessment of theory and assessment of practice.
- all courses seemed to have difficulty in articulating higher levels of practice.
- preparation for clinical assessors was similar across most courses although the adequacy of this preparation for assessment of higher levels of practice requires evaluation.
- all courses required students to undertake a substantial piece of independent work over an extended period of time. This usually incorporated some research activity around the subject of nursing.
- all courses appeared to be struggling with the complexity of meeting the requirements of both higher education and the NHS.
- all post-registration and most pre-registration courses were fully modularised.

- there was a common emphasis on flexibility of delivery in post-registration courses.

7. Summary of the ways in which documents were not comparable

- there was considerable variation in whether or not practical skills were assessed by direct observation, particularly apparent in post-registration degrees.
- there was variation across the sample in whether or not courses went beyond basic levels of competence in their assessment of practice.
- there were fundamental differences in the way courses were structured.
- there was a lack of comparability in the way in which the 360 credits of a degree programme were distributed throughout its various components.
- there was no sense of a common currency relating to credits in terms of either notional learning time or student achievement.
- there was variation in whether or not students were expected to carry out empirical research within their dissertation.
- there was considerable variation in the information which was presented in curriculum documents, both in terms of the amount and type of information and its style of presentation.
- the complexity of offering multiple pathways through a single course framework created considerable variation in post-registration courses.

8. Developmental implications

Our research suggests that, in relation to degrees in general there is a need to:

- develop mechanisms for sharing good practice across institutions which encourage movement away from an industrial secrecy model of protecting curriculum documents, towards one based on collaboration and common aspirations.
- gather empirical evidence about the relationship between the level descriptors used in curriculum documents, and students' actual progression towards degree outcomes.
- improve the currency and clarity of course documentation. This could be achieved through some standardisation of course information to be submitted in the annual monitoring and review process.

In relation to nursing degrees specifically, there is a need:

- for professional and statutory bodies to work with the QAA to ensure that nursing is fully represented in debates about threshold standards and quality assurance.
- for standards relating to the HE sector generally, to apply equally to degrees in nursing wherever possible.
- to develop a clear rationale for the title of awards given to nursing degrees.
- to clarify further the attributes expected of the graduate nurse.
- to develop standards to guide the teaching of research to degree level.
- to clarify responsibility for the quality assurance of various components of post-registration degrees.
- to encourage debate about how best to support both the academic and clinical aspects of the nurse teachers role.

Method

Seventy courses from 52 institutions were identified using the following inclusion criteria:

- all pre-registration nursing degrees.
- all post-registration degrees offering the ENB Higher Award.
- other post-registration degrees which specifically targeted registered nurses.

Thirty-two institutions agreed to participate and 50 curriculum documents were collected from participants. These documents were catalogued and coded for discreet descriptive variables. A subset of 15 documents was selected to represent the broad range of course types present in the main sample. This subset was subjected to in-depth analysis focussing particularly on course philosophy, learning outcomes and structures relating to teaching learning and assessment.

Table 1: Title of award

Title of award → / Type of course ↓	Bachelor of Nursing	Bachelor of Science	Bachelor of Arts	Totals
Pre-registration	4	14	4	22
Post-registration with Higher Award	1	9	1	11
Post-registration	1	14	2	17
Totals	6	37	7	50

Table 2: Shared Learning

Sharing with:	Pre-reg courses	Post-reg courses	Higher Award
Other nurses	20	17	9
Midwives	10	9	6
PAMs	5	5	1
Doctors	1	0	0
Non-health prof. students	5	7	0

Table 3: Credit Rating

Credits /module*	1-4 credits	5 credits	10 credits	12 credits	15 credits	20 credits	Complex	Unknown
Number courses	n=3	n=4	n=6	n=5	n=10	n=11	n=2	n=11
Hrs/module where provided**	Total hours per module range from 90-160	No time equivalents given in documents available	Total hours range from 75-180 Contact hours 20-40	Total hours range from 90-120 Contact hours 30-40	Total hours range from 120-150 Contact hours 25-45	Total hours range from 150-225 Contact hours 36-80	Courses with wide variation of credit values for each module	Either not clear in the documents or document makes reference to institutional paper which is not available
Notional workload based on summative assessment of theory	Ranges from 2000 word assessment to 2000 word + exam	2000-5000 word assignments	1500-3000 wd assignment or a combination of assignment and exam	2000-5000 word assignment	1500-6000 words or combination of assignment and exam	2000-5000 word assignment or combination of exam/essay or portfolio		

* Credits per module for each course has been identified as the credit value most frequently attached to modules within one course.

** Not all course documents provided both total hours per module and contact hours per module.

Table 4: Features of graduateness

Concept	Representation in curriculum documents
Competence	Used as an overarching concept to describe the complex and varied skills demanded at this level.
Managing change	The flexibility to cope with the changing nature of practice and changes in location of care. A recognition of the need to develop new skills.
Creativity, innovation & leadership	Ability to do things in new and creative ways in a context which is unpredictable and variable. In post-reg courses often combined with concepts of leadership and skills required for resource management.
Criticality	The ability to take a critical stance to information and experiences. Being able to handle conflicting ideas and data.
Caring and reflective practice	These two concepts often portrayed together as a way of re-conceptualising caring practices as graduate level activity.
Research-based practice	Level of research activity/engagement was frequently the means by which courses articulated the difference between graduate and non-graduate course outcomes.

Further information

For copies of the Research Highlights and the Report, please contact:

ENB
Publications Department
Victory House
170 Tottenham Court Road
London W1P 0HA

Dr. Jill Robinson, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ
jill.robinson@uea.ac.uk

Details about the Project

This 12 month project was commissioned by the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting and was undertaken between May 1997 and June 1998. Its findings contribute to wider philosophical debates about the kind of knowledge and structures which underpin degrees in nursing and the extent to which nursing degrees prepare students with the specific professional knowledge and competence required to support advance level practice.

References

Benner P. (1984) *From Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice*, Menlo Park, California: Addison-Wesley

Bloom B. (Ed) (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Book One, Cognitive Domain*, London: Longman

DoH (1990) The NHS & Community Care Act

ENB (1994) *Creating Lifelong Learners: Partnerships for Care*, London: English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

HEQC (1997) *Graduate Standards Programme: Final Report, Vol. 1*, London: Higher Education Quality Council

Steinaker N. and Bell M. (1979) *The Experiential Taxonomy - A New Approach to Teaching and Learning*, New York: Academic Press

UKCC (1994) *The Future of Professional Practice - the Councils Standards for Education and Practice following Registration*, London: United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

Winter (1993) "The problem of education levels (part 1): conceptualising a framework for credit accumulation and transfer", *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 3 90-103